

'Crackdown will not rid city of sex workers'

QUINTON MTYALA

A CITY plan to clamp down on sex workers and clients would drive them to other parts of Cape Town.

So says Vivienne Lalu, advocacy programme co-ordinator for the Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Task Force (Sweat), which in April won court a interdict preventing police from "harassing" sex workers.

She was responding to JP Smith, mayoral committee member for safety and security, who announced the new crackdown this week.

Lalu said Sweat would "monitor the situation", but said the new policy would not solve the problem of sex work, as the city would only police "what you can see".

"Sex workers will not go away ... for the next couple of months there may appear to be fewer sex workers on the streets, but it will just be the industry adapting and surveying the situation," said Lalu.

Increased policing would drive them to other areas of the city and, quoting the latest police statistics, Lalu said sex work was not behind crime.

She said Sweat understood that sex work was a criminal act, but this did not give police or the city's law enforcement officials the right to harass sex workers.

Smith said the proposed unit would initially target "streetwalkers", then brothels.

Officers from other law enforcement units would be seconded, and the plan was for them to eventually maintain a

database of the city's sex workers, using techniques borrowed from the city's Copperheads and Drug Busters units.

On Friday, 18 sex workers were arrested along Voortrekker Road.

Smith said a similar crackdown in Green Point, where he was a ward councillor, had "removed most prostitutes" from the area. He said this had encouraged businesses to move there, which was good for residents – and property values.

Apart from theft from vehicles and drug use, which went hand in hand with prostitution, the "noise factor" was a source of constant irritation. Smith said with the crackdown, the city "wants the ladies to be forced to evaluate their situation".

quinton.mtyala@inl.co.za